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COSTA RICA

FIGUERES SUPPORTS PANAMA'S POSITION ON CANAL ZONE

[Report on President Figueres' trip to Panama by special correspondent Bosco Valverde Calderon; San Jose, La Nacion, Spanish, 30 January 1973, pp 2, 4]

President Jose Figueres of Costa Rica, who met today with Gen Omar Torrijos, Panama's strong man, promised his support for this nation in the position that it has been maintaining with respect to its sovereignty over the Panama Canal Zone.

Figueres, who arrived in Panama today at 1030 hours, was lodged in the presidential suite of the El Panama Hotel, where he held a conference for more than 3 hours with Gen Omar Torrijos.

The meeting, at which the ministers of agriculture, public security, industry and commerce, and the interior were present, was declared to be of a strictly secret nature and, of course, reporters were not permitted to be present. The meeting began at 1530 hours and President Figueres and General Torrijos were completely alone at first. Later the ministers were included in the talks.

Elimination of Passports

One of the most important agreements that was reached is the elimination of passports for travelers from both countries. According to the agreement that was reached by Torrijos and Figueres, which requires the approval of the legislative assembly, citizens of Panama will be able to travel to Costa Rica by simply showing their identification cards and vice versa. The elimination of documents for inter-Central American travelers has been a long-time aspiration of President Figueres.

The Security Council

Another topic broached by Torrijos and Figueres during their long conversation this afternoon concerned the points that are to

be dealt with during the next meeting of the United Nations Security Council, which will be held in Panama this coming March. However, the topic was declared strictly secret and the spokesman stated that he was not authorized to make public the details of the conversation on this matter.

A Trade Treaty

The negotiation of a new trade treaty between Costa Rica and Panama was also discussed, inasmuch as the existing one has expired. The Costa Rican minister of economy and industries, Attorney Jorge Sanchez Mendez, held a meeting with his Panamanian colleague in order to deal with this matter. At the end of their talks, he seemed very pleased, noting that perhaps in March it might be possible to sign a new trade agreement.

Sanchez Mendez told La Nacion that both Panama and Costa Rica will form committees with representatives of public and private initiative in order to prepare drafts of bills from which they expect to get one that is properly prepared.

International Banana Agreement

Rodolfo Gurdian, well-known Costa Rican banana producer who was added to the delegation that is accompanying President Figueres on his tour through Puerto Rico and Panama, also participated in the meeting with Gen Omar Torrijos. Specifically, he posed the need for Panama to adhere to the Declaration of Guayaquil, in which the possibility of establishing an international banana agreement similar to the one that already exists for coffee is set forth.

Gurdian told Torrijos that Costa Rica had already adhered to that Declaration of Guayaquil and he explained to him that that declaration is aimed at getting all the producer nations to come to an agreement in order to maintain a consistent level of international prices for the fruit.

General Torrijos, as it transpired, gave his consent for Panama to sign the declaration, which would make El Salvador and Honduras the only ones left to endorse it.

Wages and Social Conditions

With regard to trade unions, President Figueres posed the need to Torrijos for the worker movements in the American area in general, specifically Costa Rica and Panama, to strive for equality of wages and living conditions so that there will be no unfair competition between the countries.

General Torrijos was in complete agreement and emphasized that "we do not want cheap labor to be exported."

Mutual Funds

Among the other topics that he dealt with in his conference with General Torrijos, President Figueres broached the one concerning mutual funds. "He wanted to share (with General Torrijos) his viewpoints on the previously-mentioned mutual funds," stated the spokesman who made the report at the conclusion of the meeting.

Figueres explained to Torrijos how the Costa Rican Government is trying -- and it has succeeded, according to Figueres -- to invest the current assets of the mutual funds so that instead of Costa Rican capital converted into dollars going to the already developed and industrialized countries, the current assets are invested and dollars from the mutual funds end up being invested in the countries that need that injection of capital for their development.

About Robert Vesco

Figueres explained to General Torrijos about the attacks by the international press which he has been the object of due to having agreed to the business activities of investor Robert Vesco. Figueres reiterated that Costa Rica respects the decisions of courts -- in this case, U.S. ones -- if the courts explain them, but he stated that our country does not for that reason have to turn into international police just in order to stop the entrance of capital. President Figueres' position was listened to attentively by Gen Omar Torrijos, who reserved his opinions on the matter.

Economic Development

At the conclusion of their conversation, both leaders stated that a spirit of deep understanding prevailed during the course of the meeting and they said that the objective of both is the promotion -- at all costs -- of economic development and social justice in their respective countries by means of an adequate distribution of national wealth.

A Reception

After resting for a few minutes in his room at the Panama Hotel, President Figueres went to the Presidential Palace to take part in the reception in his honor that the Panamanian President, Demetrio Lakas, gave last night.

Today President Figueres will reciprocate the honor bestowed on him by the Panamanian authorities by giving a luncheon for them at noon.

An Award

During last night's reception at the Presidential Palace an award ceremony was held for Jose Maria Figueres, the oldest son of the Costa Rican President, who was graduated as a parachutist from the school of parachutists in the Canal Zone.

Satisfied

The Costa Rican Chief Executive, who arrived in Panama this morning at 1030 hours on board a Panamanian air force plane coming from San Juan, Puerto Rico, said he was very satisfied with his visit to that island, where he attended a military dinner Sunday night. Figueres confirmed that he is prepared to act as an intermediary to achieve the liberation of the political prisoners in Cuba. He expressed his solidarity with the Cuban exiles who are ready to fight for the liberation of their country, but he reiterated that they should do so with a great deal of caution.

Today He Will Visit Public Works

This morning President Jose Figueres, accompanied by General Torrijos and President Lakas, will visit some of the most important works that the present government is carrying out on the outskirts of the capital. "It is a pity that we cannot take you to the provinces to see everything that we are doing," General Torrijos told Figueres last night, a little after their 3-hour meeting.

The First Lady

While the Costa Rican Chief Executive visits works near the capital, the first lady, Dona Karen, with her youngest daughter Kirsten, will visit a rehabilitation home and other social welfare works here in Panama. The wives of the ministers and the rest of Figueres' companions will go with the first lady on this trip.

A Press Conference

It was announced that today at noon, shortly before departing for San Jose, President Figueres will hold a press conference at which General Torrijos is also expected to be present.

The return of the Costa Rican Chief Executive and his retinue is set for today at 1600 hours, Panama time. He will be sent off with military honors at the Tocumen airport, the same way that he was received yesterday.

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